Interior Decorating Suicide

Everything I've ever done I'll do forever all at once.
-Jimmy Chad

Jimmy Chad got his driver's license at fifteen and then passed the test a year later only to give it back a year after that. That's when he began to speak in imaginary numbers.

Jimmy envied his mother Cheryl because she had a last name.

Cheryl Alqwu' was born on a roof.

Cheryl Alqwu' was born on a sled beneath a blanket of filthy rags.

Cheryl Alqwu' was born on a picnic table.

Cheryl had a last name because she understood Lushootseed. She would tell everyone who would listen that she learned Lushootseed from a crow.

No one listened.

Sometimes she was glad no one listened because she figured if she taught anyone, they'd give it away.

Cheryl's other last name was George. Cheryl George was born on a fractured slab of corrugated fiberglass that caught the rain in the fall. It broke in half during a storm. So, she used it to snowboard down her frozen driveway in December. In the spring Cheryl's uncle nailed the pieces atop two saw horses, a powwow table for twelve.

Cheryl George was born on the Tulalip Indian Reservation, but there was no room. So, her dad wandered away. His body washed ashore near Alki off Elliot Bay in Seattle. The authorities could not determine the cause of death because he was face down. The elders determined it was shame.

Sixteen years later, Cheryl met Chad Chad, Jimmy's dad. Chad Chad nailed two pieces of corrugated fiberglass together and made a church where he proposed and married Cheryl on the same day. Two months later, Jimmy was born.

Jimmy taught me to car surf, a necessary harbinger, which I ignored. He invented car surfing when he turned fifteen, when he met Edna. She was beautiful, for a car. Edna was a hard-top 1956 Chevy, virginal white, inside and out, except for the chrome details, a bride's jewels.

Tap tap…

Tap tap tap

Three a.m.

Whenever Jimmy tapped my bedroom window, I would pull the red frilly nylon fringe on my white vinyl shade until it tore. Then, I'd peer under the shade with my right hand, feel the cool aluminum window frame like Braille, and crack open the window an inch or two. Jimmy would whisper, "Hey Bill, you awake?"

"No."

Shoultes Road was our automotive North Shore, veering right of the Triangle Texaco at the north end of Marysville, running north, nearly four miles to 172nd Street and the Arlington Airport. We had two favorite surfing games. The first was rudimentary, unassailable evidence that our frontal lobes were not yet fully formed. At the south end of Shoultes, near the fire station, Jimmy would floor Edna's receptive accelerator. In the wee hours of the morning we would speed up Shoultes, down a dip, past the elementary school, over the train tracks, beyond Due's Berry Farm, to 172nd in reverse. Then, I would repeat the feat back to the fire station. After about a month, Jimmy's tolerance

increased. Thus, car surfing evolved. We still used Shoultes Road, but we used *D* rather than *R*, and our speed was measured. “Stay under 30!” I said, scrofulous and scared. Jimmy preferred forty-five. Once he hit thirty, I’d climb out my window and slither like a sneaky man across the top of the car, then enter the driver’s side window feet first as Jimmy scooted to his right. We would go round and round like a corkscrew as many times as we could between the fire station and the railroad tracks, maybe half way to 172nd, then back. When our luck was exhausted, we would stop at the Triangle Texaco for a can of chew. Then, I would throw up. Jimmy would drive home, drink his dad’s beer, and pass out. Eventually, we got Michael Bull involved because he had the best car for jumping, even though it was really his brother’s car, and we had to steal it out of his driveway and return it before his dad, Sheriff Bull, caught us and threatened us like criminals. We jumped Michael Bull’s blue Gran Torino, named the Bull-mobile, over the 136th Street railroad tracks. A new game was born.

Chad Chad, Jimmy’s dad, was a high school basketball coach with an acidic temper and an overdeveloped taste for asparagus. The Chad family was an anomaly, a Native American family that left the neighboring Tulalip Indian Reservation to live on the north end of Marysville, Washington. Their neighbors included the Duke brothers, Duker and Joey. *Duker and Joey Duke*. The Dukes lived at the end of a pot-holed cul-de-sac in a single story duplex before anyone in Marysville lived in a duplex, black rusted El Camino parked in front on blocks under a blue tarp, constricted by prolific blackberry bushes. I hated staying the night at Jimmy Chad’s.

Jimmy’s enigmatic mother, Cheryl, used to alternate shouts of “halleluiah praise Jesus” with “Don’t wear boxers. Your balls will hang to your knees by the time yer 40.”

Her grandfather, Chester George, was the first Tulalip Tribal member to integrate and graduate from Marysville Public High School, though he had to pay tuition. Cheryl was devoted to tribal lore and her Presbyterian church, usually forcing Jimmy and me to go, but sometimes we would fake sleep, especially as we got older. She'd raise the blinds and sing. "Rise and shine and give God the glory glory!"

We would fake snore.

"Come on, boys."

We would fake snore, louder. She'd shake our feet. One out of ten times, she would give up and go to church by herself. We'd sneak into the hallway bathroom and peek at Mr. Chad's stash of *Playboys* hidden behind the bath towels. Or, we'd grab a pinball out of their broken machine, which they kept in the garage. We'd roll the ball up and down the street. Jimmy's cat, Two Deers would follow.

"Hey, what kinda name is Two Deers?" anyone would ask.

"I don't know. My mom just told me our cat needed a name. So, I figured the first thing I saw out my window would be my cat's name. I got up, looked out and saw two deers humping in the woods."

On one particular pinball rolling day the Duke brothers appeared, no shirts, no shoes, brown teeth. They shoved Jimmy, made whooping noises with one hand over their mouths, the other like a peace sign behind their heads.

"Ha ha ha!!! Look at us. We're Fugowie Injuns! Drink some Rainier, where-the-fuh-gar-we?! HA HA HA!" Then, Duker narrowed his eyes and laid them on me. "Hey, Jimmy, who's the kid thinks he's too good to say hi?" Duker was a talker. Joey was big, quiet, confident. He was the one who needed dealt with.

"You should go home," I said, eyes fixed on Joey.

"Fuck you, shit face! This is our street," Duker said, the tip of his tongue filling several gaps in his teeth. Joey looked me up and down. Jimmy was quiet, uncertain. My mouth went dry knowing I had to punch Joey first and accurately because he would be the most problematic. But Duker stepped forward, directly into my independent right hand. Jimmy caught Duker's front left tooth out of mid-air. Duker fell and fortuitously tripped Joey. I jumped on top of Joey and bloodied his nose. He could not see and hollered, "Stop, stop!!!" Sometimes it's good to be lucky.

Two unfortunate events in successive weekends put a halt to our car surfing. The first happened out by Tulare Beach at the north end of the Rez. That was the first time I saw Jimmy Chad speaking to his grandpa, even though I could not see anyone or anything but a name on a road sign. Michael Bull picked me up in the Bull-mobile, and we met Jimmy at Totem Grocery. We swapped cars and hopped in Edna to meet three Everett girls, who were hanging out at one of their parent's beach cabins. Jimmy had been seeing one of the girls, Annie Cunnington, fateful long blonde hair and willingness. She wore her maroon skirt as if it guarded the secret to everlasting happiness. Her lithe sultry legs intentionally caressed Jimmy's entire body, but I believe the pregnancy was accidental. Annie and her two friends lived on the bluff in Mukilteo overlooking Port Gardner and attended Everett High School because they were too snobby for Mariner, surrounded by apartments, graffiti, and prejudice.

About ten miles out on the Rez Road near Port Susan we decided to play our favorite game, right after Jimmy saluted his grandpa amid a gauntlet of *In Memory of*

signs. The Rez road was notorious for drunk driving fatalities, usually pedestrians getting pasted by vans with no headlights along twelve miles of unlit, winding, fir-tree covered pot-holed asphalt. Each fatality is memorialized by a sign along the side of the road. Chester George's was erected in the late 1940's, the first so honored.

"Who you talkin' to?" Michael asked. I shivered.

"Chester, you know? He lives on the sign back there with his name on it."

"Does he wave?" I asked.

"Sometimes. Other times he nods, like hey, you know?"

Then, Jimmy must have been thinking about Health class because he asked, "What if Earth is a giant face with acne; caves are pores, and the dark is a giant black-head waiting to engulf us like a mass of phagocytes?"

Jimmy controlled the foot pedals. Michael handled the stick, three on the tree, and I steered from the passenger side with my left hand, difficult without power steering. Oh, and Jimmy was blindfolded. Jimmy liked to drive too fast. So, when we needed to turn left onto Tulare Way, I struggled to crank the wheel while imploring Jimmy to slow down, while negotiating Bull's stick-shifting arm, while Jimmy was as blind as teenage love. CLUNK! It happened as fast as the five-letter word. All the lug-nuts snapped off the right front wheel, and Edna's chrome bumper played the giant sparkler on the 4th of July.

"What the hell was that?!" Jimmy asked, too shocked to remove his blindfold.

"Um, well," I began, foretelling my poetic prose. "Take off your stupid blind-fold!" Jimmy slowly revealed his eyes when I asked, "See that gully below the trees?"

"Yeah."

"Your right front tire is somewhere down there."

"Shit," Michael and Jimmy harmonized.

When we were elementary school-aged, Jimmy and I used to climb up the roof of his house and fake fight. When a car would drive by, one of us would throw a fake punch while the other would fall off the house. The drivers always slammed on the breaks, "You kids ok?"

We'd grab our bellies and laugh, laugh, laugh.

"Fuckin' smart-asses!" they'd say.

Then, we'd get in a silly argument about something stupid like who more valuable to the Boston Red Sox, Jim Rice or Fred Lynn? He always picked Lynn. I always picked Rice. Jimmy would say something senseless like, "You don't like Lynn because he's white."

"I'm white, nimrod."

Then Jimmy would stand too close. I'd shove him in his garden, climb on top and pepper his shoulders and face.

"Get the off me ya queer bait!" he'd say, then tell me to go home.

I'd oblige, get maybe a hundred yards down the road, turn around and see Jimmy following me on his Schwinn. I'd stop and stare. He'd talk. He loved to talk.

"You want to ride to practice together?" he'd say.

"All right."

*

A week after we trashed Edna, Jimmy and I walked to the video store and rented *Monty Python and the Holy Grail.* Jimmy gave me a pinch of Beechnut, which I promptly barfed onto the feet of some guy pumping gas at the Triangle Texaco.

"Sorry, mister," I said and slurped up my saliva. Then I turned to Jimmy, "I don't wanna walk home." Besides, neither of us had a VCR. So, we called our friend, Jason. He had a brand new VCR, and he drove a five-speed fire-orange VW Sirocco, the Scorpions blaring on his fancy stereo. I bought a *Squirt* and a microwavable burrito to settle my stomach. Jimmy pulled a blue bandana out of his letterman's jacket, perfect for blindfolding Jason.

Whenever we called Jason, we could hear his mom screeching in the background, "Don't let that Jimmy kid drive!"

"Come on, Jason, Jimmy's not gonna drive," I'd say. "He'll be in the back seat on the stick. You do all the pedals. I'll steer. Simple. You have power steering."

Shit, he thought. "OK," he said.

We made it three miles up Old 99, no cops, no problems.

"OK, here's the tricky part," I said. Two ditches surrounded Jason's gravel driveway. "Slow down."

He did as Jimmy down-shifted.

"OK, here we g-"

It's difficult to grasp. I was steering with my left hand, relaxed, confident. It just slipped off the wheel. Instinctively, both my hands reached for the dashboard as the car veered like a cheating wife. Jimmy released the stick and slumped, bracing himself with his feet pressed on the backs of our front seats. Jason was blind.

Splash!

We plunged grill first into the six-foot deep ditch past the driveway.

"What the hell was that?!" Jason asked, stunned, forgetting to remove his blind-fold. I didn't ask him to remove it.

"Um, well," I began, "we're in the ditch."

"What?! Oh, shit, my mom's gonna kill me!!!" Jason feared his mother, but he didn't die. We called the tow truck for the Sirocco. When the wrecker got there, the driver just laughed and laughed. "Hey, aren't you the guys I picked up last week at Tulare?"

After Edna was fixed Jimmy snuck out alone most of the time. He began a monthly routine climbing the Fire Trail in his car or on foot, looking for The Light, the Pig Swamp, the Stick Indians, Chester George, all the legends Cheryl taught him. He wouldn't say much about the Stick Indians because they were so difficult to find. They were slain warriors and high school drop-outs. They lived in the trees, only came out at night, vanished when they turned sideways, and they protected the Pig Swamp, where *no one* wanted to go. The Pig Swamp is the darkest place on earth, black hole dark. It eats moonlight. Some say when Jesus cast Legion into the two thousand swine that went insane and drowned themselves, they surfaced in the swamp only five yards north of a dirt cut-out that connects the Fire Trail to Marine Drive, the Rez Road. Jimmy spoke very little of what he saw other than Chester perching on a sign and Michael's dad cruising the Rez in the Pumpkin Patrol.

Tap tap tap

Tap tap tap

"Hey, Bill, you awake?" Jimmy whispered.

My frilly red fringe detached from the shade. "No one in the whole world's awake. It's 3:00 am, and it's Wednesday."

"Yeah, well my grandpa's up, and I wanted someone to talk to."

"So why'd you come here?"

"Cuz they hate me on the Rez."

"Who hates you?"

"The Stick Indians, the full-bloods, everyone, except my grandpa. I asked him why we all have two first names?'"

"I thought your grandpa died in the 40's."

"He did, but they only buried him three feet deep."

"Huh?!"

"He says, 'We all forgot how to pronounce our last names when they cut our hair.' Then, he leaned over his sign, you know? He just stared at some brown hairy spider spinning a web between the post and the sign lookin' to catch the little red beetle that lives in the band of his hat. Oh, hey, I think someone's comin', gotta go."

*

I was the fastest breast-stroker in the state of Washington for seventy-five yards. Too bad the race was a hundred. But the point is, I could swim. I used to make Michael Bull swim across Lake Goodwin, a large lake just north of the Fire Trail. He refused to swim back for fear of drowning. So, I would swim, and he would run, a good race. And as I said, Jimmy liked to climb. So, the three of us decided to go to the Stilly River and

dive off the Silvana train bridge. I was reluctant, but if I did it, I could write a letter of redemption to my dad, who had ridiculed me and called me a girl when I refused to dive off it at age six..

Michael and Jimmy scaled my fear of heights like spidermen, while I preferred the soft river sand, terra firma. Jimmy spun a flip and a half off the bridge's apex and laughed at the futile grasp of the river's mellow August current. Michael quickly followed.

"Let's go, Sally!" they sang.

Sometimes there are reasons for posted signs, especially ones that say, *Absolutely No Diving.* I stood atop the bridge, forty feet above the mocking river. Jimmy and Michael stood below and to my left, not paying as much attention as I believed this moment warranted.

"OK!" I yelled and envisioned a 40-foot Y-chromosome I'd mail to my dad as I dived head first, elbows tight to my head, like streamlined swimmers are supposed to do off starting blocks only two feet high. From forty feet I knifed through the air like a peregrine falcon, cutting the surface like an Olympic platform diver, barely a ripple, but a spike of water impaled my right eardrum like an ice pick. All my hearing went purple. I bobbed up to the surface, but my equilibrium was AWOL. I looked up at the sky and the trees, a geological roulette wheel. My face involuntarily dropped into the water. Instinct told me to *paddle down hard with your left arm!*

"Help!" I yelled between gurgles. Jimmy and Michael laughed, thinking I was playing a joke because *I was a swimmer.* "I'm serious!" I was serious. The mellow current had a solid grip on my entire belief system.

"Oh, shit!" they chorused and bumped into each other, trying to decide who should get me as my aspirations were pulled down river.

By dumb luck their long and wide hands grabbed a firm hold of my arms, and they pulled me ashore. Jimmy Chad and Michael Bull saved my life. I tried to stand, but had no balance and promptly fell flat on my face. The doctor said I ruptured my eardrum. I never wrote the letter to my dad.

*

At school Jimmy began making random statements. "Hey, Indians don't experience male patterned baldness." Friends expressed concern about his drinking, that he needed to quit before killing all his brain cells. "Quittin's easy. My dad does it every time he falls asleep. Besides, it's all part of an experiment. I'm trying to devolve into a single celled organism." He read more and became infatuated with Kurt Vonnegut's *The Slaughterhouse-Five*, which led him to the conclusion, "Everything I've ever done I'll do forever all at once." Then, he would add a random question, "You ever notice there are no 30 year-old suicide bombers?" Random statements + Random question = Future peculiar behavior.

The future came quickly. Annie's stomach expanded while Jimmy moved in circles, chasing and fleeing his dreams. He wanted to be a city hero and a Reservation hero. Everyone came to watch Jimmy play basketball, even the elders: Louis Henry, Johnny Sam, Stanley Parker, Willie Moses, even Walter WhiteBear, an adopted Inuit from Alaska. Marysville missed the play-offs Jimmy's senior year after he missed the front end of a one-and-one against archrival Snohomish who went on to the District title.

Fraught with failure, Jimmy often cut school. When he did attend classes, everyone at our lunch table teased him, saying he wouldn't graduate.

In May 1986, I turned eighteen, a month before graduation. I Teacher-assisted for the basketball coach, Mr. Wold. He had no idea why I was smiling, that it was my birthday.

"Hey, Billy-boy, what's the good news?" he asked as I sat in a pastel green plastic school chair next to his fake wood desk in the back of the room.

"Well-"

That's when Jason appeared, ashen and confused, like he was trapped in a freezer. Wold looked up and understood they needed to speak outside. Both faces contorted and changed colors like a mood ring. Then, EVERYTHING went black. Wold's lips turned to clay as some invisible potter animated them to form, *ohmygod!* He turned the same color as Jason when he returned to class. "I can't fucking believe it," he said to no one. I had never heard a teacher swear. His eyes welled up. I had never seen a teacher cry. He slumped and buried his face with the palms of his trembling hands. I ran outside, but Jason was gone. I ran back to Coach Wold.

"What's going on?"

He looked up, vacant. "Jimmy's dead."

Sheriff Bull found Jimmy nearly ten miles west on Marine Drive, crashed below a sign that read *In Memory of Chester George*. The police report was clean, void of the finer details such as the buck shot that turned out to be a dental filling wedged in the odometer; muddy grass in the door handle that turned out to be matted hair, an ear lobe, and chunks of jawbone and brain. Officer Bull merely made mental notes of the stench,

Edna's bench seat involuntarily shit-stained and soaked in urine that reeked of asparagus. The floorboards held puddles of facial soup and internal bodily gravy atop sandy gravel that turned out to be teeth and shrapnel from Jimmy's cheekbones and nasal cavity. What Deputy Bull did report was true enough: man found dead on arrival at scene of apparent self-inflicted shotgun wound to the head, hands firmly adhered to the shotgun, twelve empty beer cans on the passenger side floorboard.

You might ask why he did it. Was it an identity crisis? A pregnant girlfriend? Alcohol? Maybe all. Maybe none. Everyone looked for a reason. What was going through his mind besides hundreds of powder-propelled BB's? I asked Jimmy why, once in a dream and once after church just two years ago.

Jimmy entered the high school pool through the spectator's door and followed me into the small, pool-side locker room. I was going to shower, but the timing did not seem right. He looked directly at me, so directly, in that moment, I knew I existed.

"I'm sorry," he told me, but it was difficult to know if he believed it. He was running, unsure of what to say, where to go. They chased him at school, along the Fire Trail, and found him in my dream.

"Gotta go," he said.

"I know."

He turned sideways and was gone.

Jimmy left no note. Sometimes there are no answers. Sometimes guys just shoot themselves in the head. They miss most of the time and walk through life with a massive concussion. Jimmy didn't miss. He was always a good shot, except for that one night in Snohomish.

I'm driving home from church, listening to nothing on the radio, not even AM, just raindrops on my hood, beautiful music. I veer onto the Exit 199 off-ramp by accident even though it is where I need to go. I could take a right onto 4th, but I live left, so I go that way, west. I am on Marine Drive now, wondering if I will see him again, but it is light now so I see a diabetic Indian woman sitting along side the road in a mud puddle, thumb in the air like Jack Kerouac. I pull over, making sure the passenger seat is clean, suitable, then open the door. She never looks at me, which tells me she does not want to talk though she never closes her mouth. She climbs in and knocks the wind out of the seat.

Her first words come from her clothes, a blue nylon jacket, Lummi Basketball in red letters, Lester on the front left though she doesn't look anything like him. Her jacket and navy cotton sweat pants are drenched, the first wash in weeks. Her cane carries the conversation without words, swollen feet, already missing toes. She is wearing shoes, but you can still tell. Her feet are tiny bread loaves, bound like a Chinese aristocrat, but her husband is no prince, and her fingernails understand manual labor. Her toes hurt, especially the missing ones. She wears the rain like a mask, but her sweat betrays her, thick with sucrose. Her face is full of stories, and I wonder if she is my grandma.

She changes her mind about talking and says, "It's fuggin' cold, yeah?" But it was rhetorical, so I ask her where she's going. Without looking she says, "Who fuggin' knows where anyone's goin'?" She wants breakfast. She needs it.

We are driving west now, all four miles to Totem Grocery. There is no totem, just a plastic sign that tells its own history. She tells me of her fuggin' husband who fuggin' died in jail 'cuz the federal agent forgot to grab her husband's fuggin' insulin from the

dresser. So, he died in some anonymous Oklahoma jail-cell before he could keep his fuggin' promise. He left her and their four kids, but he was coming back. The kids aren't kids anymore but still fuggin' live with her. After she gets her quarterly check she will take the fuggin' bus to Enid, claim his property. Says he left a hundred acres of fertile land. She holds that belief like a vice. She wants to get to Enid before one of her fuggin' daughters claims the land as her own. The federal agents just drive doughnuts all over it and have some fuggin' kid hose off the dust from their government Fords.

We are pulling in to the Totem Grocery when she nearly looks at me, but she sees her cousin instead. Her cousin is eating miniature powdered donuts chased by cans of Rainier in the back of her Indian van. The window sticker says, "Indian Van." Her cousin has no more money, no more gas. A monolithic Indian man steps out of the van and grabs a donut and a beer. He and the cousin don't look at me. They are busy fishing their pockets with driftnet fingers that come up as empty as the gas tank.

Mandolin returns to my truck. That is what I call her, but only to myself. She is sad, dying, beautiful. She asks me nothing. So I go inside the store and buy her a six-pack of PBR. "Thanks man, fuggin' A, yeah?!" I don't ask her where she wants to go, so I take her back, not two hundred years, just the four miles plus an extra hundred yards into another country, a Delhi slum surrounded by fir trees, a fifth wheel, a picnic table, and three more cousins. One looks eighteen. He is looking straight through me, but I am not really there. His lower jaw tickles the tabletop, FAS. One cousin walks behind the fifth wheel. The other is tall, looks at Mandolin, which is why he doesn't point his shotgun at my truck. He just leans on it. He was once a tribal basketball hero. His name is Spencer

David, but he doesn't play basketball any more. Mandolin gets out, holds up her six cans of breakfast and says, "fuggin' A!" They all smile but not until I leave.

I am driving back to Tulare on Marine Drive, but I can't see the road in my daydream. About a mile past Mission Beach I am heading up hill, thinking about church, about Mandolin, about dead friends. I drive off the road and smash into a sign, "PLEASE DON'T DRINK & DRIVE in memory of JIMMY CHAD." I meet my forty-first police officer. "What seems to be the problem?" he asks.

"Guess I hate road signs," I say. He doesn't smile… until he hands me my seventeenth ticket. I tell myself, no more car games. *No one replaces the sign, and I wonder if I will ever see Jimmy Chad again.*